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Letter dated 13 March 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 13 March 1998, addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hüseyin E. ÇELEM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 13 March 1998 from Mr. Aytuğ Plümer addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 26 February 1998 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations (A/52/808-S/1998/173), which contains unfounded allegations regarding cultural property in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

The Greek Cypriot representative once again refers to the TRNC as an "occupied area". I wish to underline that the only occupation in Cyprus is the 35-year-old usurpation and occupation of the seat of government of the once bi-communal Republic of Cyprus by the Greek Cypriot regime in the South.

Allegations on the so-called "destruction of the cultural identity" of Northern Cyprus have been amply dealt with in our previous communications addressed to Your Excellency, most recently in my letter dated 3 March 1998. Suffice it to say that it is the Greek Cypriot side that has always tried to wipe out the Turkish-Muslim heritage of Cyprus, in particular during the years between 1963 and 1974 when, in the process of a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing directed against the Turkish Cypriot people, mosques, shrines and other places of Muslim worship in 103 villages across the island were destroyed. Today, the Greek Cypriot administration is still perpetuating a policy of religious intolerance and showing undisguised contempt towards the Islamic heritage in South Cyprus. At the same time, the Greek Cypriot side is doing its utmost to hamper the efforts of the TRNC authorities to secure financial and technical assistance from international organizations which would contribute towards the preservation of the antiquities and the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus.

The Greek Cypriot representative specifically makes allegations in his letter concerning the Armenian monastery of St. Makar in the TRNC. These allegations are totally unfounded and are designed to mislead world public opinion on the state of historic sites in Northern Cyprus and the ongoing preservation efforts. Firstly, there are no plans for the conversion of the said monastery into a hotel. Secondly, it should be pointed out that if indeed there had been plans to put the monastery into everyday use, this would be in accordance with the relevant international instruments under which the conservation of historical buildings through use is not only permissible but also recommended. The TRNC Department of Antiquities and Museums has plans for the restoration of the Armenian monastery of St. Makar through a project involving a private institution with expertise in this field.

It is evident, therefore, that the Greek Cypriot allegations concerning the monastery of St. Makar in particular, and the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus in general, are baseless and politically motivated. Our relevant authorities are working assiduously at the task of preserving the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus. The Greek Cypriot side should be strongly urged by

all concerned to cease all efforts to exploit the issue as a propaganda device, while the blocking the provision of aid to the TRNC authorities for the upkeep of cultural property.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aytuğ PLÜMER
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus